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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study conducted by the Washington State Task Force on Student Transportation Safety are presented in this report. The data-collection process involved four phases: meetings with experts in student transportation and pedestrian safety; public meetings, informational work sessions, and tours of problems areas; task force meetings; and analysis of public comments. Findings are presented in two categories--the safety of children walking to and from school, and their safety while riding school buses. Eleven recommendations are made, with special attention to the background of and action required for each. The recommendations are as follows: (1) create a School Sidewalk, Pathway, and Bus Stop Improvement Program; (2) establish developer impact fees for sidewalks, pathways, and school bus stops; (3) require school bus stops in new subdivisions; (4) establish statewide rules for crosswalk safety; (5) change laws for school bus stop violators; (6) provide resources for drivers of special-need students; (7) provide school bus drivers with student management resources; (8) equip school buses with crossing arms; (9) mandate a school safety education program; (10) provide hazardous walking funding for social problems; and (11) replace obsolete school buses. A list of task force members and a table of the recommendations' estimated costs are included. (LMI)

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OCTOBER 1990

Final report of the Washington State Task Force on Student Transportation Safety

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Final Report of the Washington State Task Force on Student Transportation Safety

■ **Chaired by**

Senator Patty Murray

Representative Grace Cole

October 1990

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I. Introduction

As the population of Washington has grown, the number of cars clogging our streets has increased dramatically. In some regions of the state, especially in the Puget Sound area, this increased traffic has led not only to traffic jams on our freeways and arterials, but also extremely unsafe conditions for our children as they travel to and from school.

The problem is especially acute on rural, two-lane roads that have historically carried few vehicles. Many of these once rural roads are now jammed with cars during rush hours and at other times of the day as development has overwhelmed the rural road system. Often, these roads have no or inadequate shoulders, making it extremely dangerous for school children as they walk to and from school. While state, city, and county transportation agencies are attempting to upgrade the safety of these roads, many believe that additional efforts are needed.

In response to these safety concerns, which were expressed by parents, school officials, and others, the Washington Legislature created the Task Force on Student Transportation Safety. The task force was established in 1989 to develop recommendations for reducing the dangers that children face as they travel to and from school. More specifically, Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2066 directed the task force to study:

> (a) Student pedestrian safety while traveling to and from school, including pedestrian needs, hazardous walking conditions, school crossing guards, and other related issues;
>
> (b) The need for edge stripping and curbing for roadways and identifying sources of funding such projects; and
>
> (c) The need for school districts, counties, cities, and the state to set standards for infrastructure improvements in conjunction with housing developments

Membership on the task force included four state legislators and representatives of parents, the housing industry, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department of Transportation, school bus personnel, the State Patrol, the Traffic Safety Commission, local law enforcement personnel, cities, and counties.

Task Force on Student Transportation Safety

■ Committee List

Representative Grace Cole, Co-Chair
1st Legislative District

Senator Patty Murray, Co-Chair
1st Legislative District

Senator Leo Thorsness
11th Legislative District

Representative Bruce Holland
47th Legislative District

Don Carnahan, Supervisor
SPI, Pupil Transportation

Chuck Hayes, Program Director
Washington Traffic Safety Commission

Cary Matthews
Washington State Patrol

Jim Stevenson, Transportation Supervisor
Federal Way School District

Jeff Cook, Transportation Supervisor
Northshore School District

Sue Carnahan, Transportation Supervisor
Sumner School District

Martha Shreve, School Bus Driver
Kennewick School District

Irene Jones
Washington State PTA

Greg Nickels, Councilman
King County Council

Loyd Fergestrom, Asst. Traffic Engineer
Dept. of Transportation

Mary Weis
WA State School Directors Assoc.

Ron Waldner, Chief
Tukwila Police Department

Randy Scott, Asst. Executive Director
WA State Assoc. of Counties

Jim Justin, Asst. Dir. for Operations
Assoc. of Washington Cities

Ross Kelley, Transp. Planning Engr.
Spokane County

Larry Sundquist, Bldg. Industry Assoc.
Sundquist Homes

II. Process Used in Developing the Recommendations

In developing the recommendations, the Task Force completed a four-phase process.

The first phase consisted of a series of background meetings in which experts in student transportation and pedestrian safety were invited to make presentations. During these background meetings, the committee reviewed traffic and pedestrian accident data, the current condition of the state's school bus fleet with respect to safety improvements, and the formula the state uses in paying school districts for school bus costs. Recent pedestrian and school bus safety legislation also was discussed.

The second phase consisted of three public meetings combined with informational work sessions with school district personnel and local government officials. The meetings were held in Kent, Spokane, and Bothell. Tours of specific problem areas were also conducted, allowing the task force members to witness the unsafe walking conditions on once-rural roads, the congestion and traffic surrounding urban schools, and a host of other problems.

The public meetings were designed to inform parents and residents about the task force's responsibilities and to identify problems that needed to be addressed.

The third phase consisted of a series of task force meetings designed to summarize and prioritize the identified issues, and to formulate recommendations for addressing the issues. The draft recommendations were mailed, with a request for comments, to approximately 70 individuals who testified at the public meetings and work sessions.

As a result of the request for comments, approximately twenty individuals responded. Phase four of the process included analysis and consideration of these public comments and final adoption of the recommendations.

III. Summary of Findings and Problem Identification

Summarized below are the findings of the Task Force and problems that were identified during the group's deliberations. The summary is divided into two categories. The first category involves issues related to the safety of children who walk or ride bicycles to school. The second category pertains to the safety of children who ride school buses.

A. Safety of Children Walking To and From School

1. **Infrastructure Improvements** – In many regions of the state, students are walking or riding bicycles to school on very busy streets that have no sidewalks, small or nonexistent shoulders, and inadequate street crossing signals or markings. According to parents, school officials and local government representatives, there is a need to construct additional sidewalks, improve road shoulders, and improve the marking of street crossings within two miles of school buildings.

Related questions that were raised included:

(a) Who should be responsible for ensuring infrastructure improvements are provided?
(b) Who should pay for the improvements?
   1 In new subdivisions?
   2 In existing subdivisions?
   3 Along city, county, and state roads outside of subdivisions?

2. **Traffic Control Measures** – The potential for traffic/pedestrian accidents in the immediate vicinity of school was apparent, especially in urban areas and when schools are located on heavily used arterials. Spokane officials, school districts, and others emphasized the need to improve traffic control measures in the immediate vicinity of schools.

3. **Pedestrian Safety Education** – While the State Patrol, local law enforcement authorities, school districts and the Superintendent of Public Instruction offer traffic safety education instruction, it was felt that currently available resources were limited. In their view, the state needs to enhance pedestrian safety education for all elementary school students.

4. **Legal Liability for Pedestrian Safety** – On several occasions, the question arose as to who is liable for children when they walk to school. Also, under what circumstances are schools liable? If a school district places school patrol guards at an intersection several blocks from the school, is the district liable for the students as they walk from the school to the intersection with the crossing guards? Representatives from the Spokane School District wanted to protect the district from legal liability issues associated with providing additional school patrol guards at dangerous intersections not located within the immediate vicinity of school buildings. Others felt that the larger question of liability also should be addressed.

B. Safety of Children Riding School Buses

1. **Accidents Occurring during Bus Loading/Unloading** – In recent years, there have been several accidents while unloading school buses. During the committee's deliberations, a young child was run over by a bus just after the child had left the bus. Many parents, school officials, and others requested that measures be taken to reduce the number of accidents that occur when children are loading and unloading from school buses

2. **Reducing Injuries when Bus Collisions Occur** – A very tragic 1988 church activity bus accident in Kentucky, in which 26 children and the driver were killed, reinforced the need to ensure measures are taken to protect passengers and drivers when collisions and other bus accidents occur. While the federal government instituted stringent safety standards for buses in 1977, approximately 32 percent of the buses in Washington were built prior to 1977 and thus do not have the enhanced safety features. Many speakers thought that steps needed to be taken to replace the pre-1977 buses, thus reducing the extent of passenger and driver injuries when school bus accidents do occur

3. **Hazardous Walking Conditions** – Under current state law, the state does not reimburse school districts for the transportation of students who live within a one-mile radius of a school unless it is determined that the child would encounter "hazardous walking conditions." The current formula for making the determination

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of a hazardous condition involves only traffic-related hazards. It was felt by some parents that the formulas should be revised to consider "social hazards," such as areas with high crime rates, and that greater weight should be given to traffic hazards when considering the danger to younger students (e.g., grades kindergarten through 3).

4. **Bus Pullouts** – As a result of testimony and field observations, it became apparent to the Task Force that school buses are often required to load and unload students at locations that are hazardous to the children getting on and off the bus, and that are likely to result in bus/vehicle collisions. Providing safer school bus pullouts for loading and unloading students was identified as a need that should be addressed.

5. **Student Supervision** – Parents and school bus drivers expressed concerns with the difficulty of maintaining adequate supervision of a large bus load of children. This problem makes it more difficult for the driver to perform his or her other duties in a safe manner. While it was agreed that the problem was not widespread, districts were able to identify certain routes that tended to be more of a problem than others. In general, it was felt that school bus drivers should be provided additional resources to effectively handle disruptive students on the bus.

6. **Special Education Bus Aides** – School buses and vans, often specially equipped, are providing transportation to a large number of special education students who have a variety of behavioral, health, and emotional needs. On occasion, these students need assistance while the bus is underway. While some school districts provide aides on their buses, other districts do not. Several parents argued that additional funds should be provided to provide more aides on special education buses.

7. **School Bus Safety Education** – While there are efforts to teach school children school bus safety, parents and educators felt that additional resources were needed to enhance school bus safety education for elementary school students.

8. **Public Education and Enforcement of Existing Traffic Laws** – A number of speakers and several Task Force members were concerned that the public is not aware of the existing laws regarding passing buses during loading and unloading, and that laws prohibiting the passing of buses are not adequately enforced. There was also concern that current traffic laws pertaining to traffic safety in the immediate vicinity of schools were inadequate and poorly enforced.

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IV. Proposed Recommendations for Addressing the Identified Problems

Based on the Task Force's findings, the following recommendations were formulated. The reader will note that many, but not all, of the identified problems are addressed in the recommendations. A list of the recommendations, with their estimated costs, are shown in Table I.

Table 1

Recommendations of the Task Force on Student Transportation Safety

#	Title of Recommendation	Costs to State/School Districts
1	School Sidewalk, Pathway, and Bus Stop Improvement Program	$100,000 Inventory; $? million for improvements to be shared by local and state governments
2	Impact Fees for Sidewalks, Pathways and School Bus Stops	None - (Developers/new homeowners pay)
3	Requiring School Bus Stops in New Subdivisions	None - (Developers/new homeowners pay)
4	Establishing Statewide Rules for Crosswalk Safety	$300,000-$500,000
5	School Bus Stop Law Violator Change	$55,000 for video system; Unknown add. costs to prosecute violators
6	Providing Resources for drivers of Special Need Students	$2,500,000 annually
7	Providing Drivers Student Manager Resources	$55,000
8	Equipping School Buses with Crossing Arms	$500,000
9	Mandating a School Safety Education Program	$250,000 annually-Program/SPI; $600,000 annually-Safety Ed. Off/WSP; $125,000 annually-Public Service Announcements
10	Providing Hazardous Walking Funding for Social Problems	Unknown-Annual cost per 1000 kids is approx. $170,000. Estimated maximum: $1,200,000 annually
11	School Bus Replacement	$15,000,000 annually

Recommendation #1

School Sidewalk, Pathway, and Bus Stop Improvement Program

Summary of Recommendation:

A School Sidewalk, Pathway, and Bus Stop Improvement Program should be created to identify and fund capital construction projects that will enhance the safety of students walking to public schools, and the safety of children loading and unloading school buses. With the exception of school bus pullouts, projects would have to be located within a two-mile radius of a school building.

The program would consist of three phases. Phase one would include an inventory of hazardous streets and roads within a two-mile radius of schools, and an inventory of unsafe bus stops. The inventory would focus on **existing problems**. Prior to conducting the inventory, criteria would be developed for determining if specific roads and bus stops are hazardous. The criteria could then be applied on a school-by-school basis.

Phase two would be to develop a capital construction plan for identifying priority projects, and determining which jurisdiction (school district, state, county, or city) has responsibility for making the priority improvements.

During phase three, funding from the responsible jurisdictions would be sought, and construction would commence. It is likely that funding would be staggered over a number of years, with highest priority projects being funded first.

In concert with phase one, school walkway standards should be developed to be applied when new schools are constructed. These standards would require that walkway improvement projects be completed within a two-mile radius of new schools prior to the opening of the school, or soon thereafter. Standards also would be developed for school bus stops in new residential developments and when roads are improved.

The types of improvement projects that would be considered include: construction of sidewalks and pathways; enlargement of road shoulders; painting of edge stripes and crosswalks; installation of curbing, rumble bars, speed control devices, traffic control signals, and signs; construction or widening of school bus pullouts; and other measures designed to increase student pedestrian and bus safety.

Background:

As discussed in the identification of issues, a large number of children are walking to school on busy streets that have no sidewalks or adequate shoulders. In addition, school buses are loading and unloading children in locations that are hazardous for the children, bus driver, and motorists. The lack of safety features puts these children-- and especially younger students-at risk of getting injured or killed by passing motorists. The risk is especially high in regions of the state that are experiencing rapid residential growth.

Some local jurisdictions, such as King and Snohomish Counties, have programs to fund sidewalks. However, it is clear that the amount of funds available is inadequate to meet the identified needs. Impact fees, which were permitted in the recently adopted "Growth Bill" (SHB 292), may also be a source of funds for pedestrian and school bus stop improvements. However, it is not expected that these fees will be adequate to meet the identified needs.

Action Required:

Implementation of the program will require funding for the initial inventory, and state and local government appropriations for the priority sidewalk, pathway, and school bus stop improvements identified in the inventory.

The development of standards for sidewalks and pathways in the vicinity of new schools and standards for school bus stops will require legislation.

Recommendation # 2

Impact Fees for Sidewalks, Pathways and School Bus Stops

Summary of Recommendation:
Clarify that sidewalks, pathways and school bus stops are eligible for developer impact fees.

Background:
The 1990 Legislature passed legislation (SHB 2929) that allows local government to assess impact fees when new developments are permitted. The impact fees must be used for "public facilities" as defined in the bill. The current definition of public facilities includes "public streets and roads." To ensure that sidewalks, pathways, and bus stops are eligible for impact fees, it has been suggested that the statutes be amended to specifically include sidewalks, pathways, and bus stops in the definition of public facilities.

Action Required:
Passage of legislation amending RCW 82.02.

Recommendation # 3

Requiring that Appropriate Provisions be made for School Bus Stops in Subdivisions

Summary of Recommendation:
Amend state law to require that appropriate provisions be made for school bus stops in subdivisions.

Background:
Under existing law (RCW 58.17.110), before a local government approves a subdivision, it must make appropriate provisions for public health, safety, and general welfare, open spaces, streets or roads, other public ways, **transit stops,** schools and school grounds, and safe walking conditions for students who walk only to and from school. While transit stops are included in the criteria, school bus stops are not. To help ensure that school bus stops are provided in new residential developments, it has been recommended that school bus stops be added to the list.

Action required
Passage of legislation that adds "school bus stops" to RCW 58.17.110.

Recommendation # 4

Establish Statewide Rules Regarding Crosswalk Safety

Summary of Recommendation:

Adopt a program similar to the State of Arizona School Safety Program, which is a formalized, statewide program administered by the Arizona Department of Transportation. The program includes guidelines for:

- School Site selection
- On-Site safety
- Off-Site safety
- School safety program
- School crossing controls
- Pedestrian signals
- Pedestrian overpasses
- School children as passengers

Of particular interest to the Task Force were provisions in the Arizona Revised Statute 28-797, **School Crossings**, establishing the statewide, standardized school crossing program. The program requires yellow marking of school crossings, yellow marking of the center line of the roadway and the erection of portable signs indicating that vehicles must stop when persons are in the crossing. The state sign manual provides the type and wording of portable signs indicating that school is in session, and permanent signs providing warning of approach to school crossings. A fifteen mile per hour speed limit is established for vehicles transiting the signed school cross walk area.

The cost to implement this recommendation is estimated to be between $300,000 and $500,000 for the required special signing / painting and crossing guard training. Pavement marking costs might be minimal if the changes are phased-in during normal re-striping operations. Signing and paint stripe costs would be borne by the jurisdicton responsible for maintaining the roadway. The crossing guard program would be the responsibilityof the schools - using either adult or student crossing guards. Traffic enforcement would be routine, except being more visible at the beginning of the school year.

Background:

The reported effectiveness of the Arizona program in controlling traffic at school crosswalks suggests the State of Washington would benefit by replicating this program. Although the fatal and injury pucture in Washington is better than that of Arizona, the committee recognized Arizona's overall management of the school safety program; specifically, the cross walk safety program appears to be managed more consistently throughout the state.

Action required:

The Legislature must amend state law related to speed limits and crosswalks.

Recommendation # 5

School Bus Stop Law Violator Change

Summary of Recommendation:

Two actions are recommended:
1. Change current law to make it easier to prosecute motorists who violate the school bus stop law. There should be no direct cost related to changing this law.
2. Explore the feasibility of using a video monitoring system to assist in violator identification. The cost of a pilot program is estimated to be $55,000.

Background:

Currently, when a school bus driver reports a school bus stop law violation to any law enforcement agency, the identification of the driver is a problem for the prosecution of the offender. In many areas of the state, prosecution of these violators reported by school bus drivers is not pursued. Without the risk of apprehension and prosecution, strict compliance with the school bus stop law will continue to be a problem. School bus drivers continually comment on their frustrations of no follow-through on the violations they report to local enforcement agencies.

Iowa changed its state law with regards to the identification of drivers reported as stop law violators by school bus drivers. When reported, the burden of proof is placed upon the registered owner of the vehicle passing the stopped school bus. The registered owner must either pay the fine or identify the person who was driving the vehicle at the time the violation occurred.

To improve the ability of bus drivers to identify vehicles and drivers who violate school bus stop laws, a pilot project to perfect a surveillance camera system would be helpful. The cameras would be mounted on school buses operating on routes in areas where there is a high incidence of vehicles illegally passing stopped school buses.

Action Required:

Legislative action will be required to change Washington law to implement this proposed change. An appropriation will be necessary to explore the feasibility of the video system.

Recommendation # 6

Providing Resources for Drivers of Special Need Students

Summary of Recommendation:

Certain students with special needs must be provided extra attention for their safety and the safety of other passengers while they are being transported in a school bus. The objective of monitors on such buses is to assist students with special needs while the bus driver attends to the task of safely operating the school bus.

The cost to implement this recommendation is estimated to be an additional $2,500,000 annually.

Background:

Currently there are approximately 102 monitors assisting students and school bus drivers on 1,070 school buses transporting students to and from special education programs statewide. Monitors on special transportation buses are necessary based upon the needs of the students riding the bus. Drivers need help on buses transporting students with behavior disorders and students who need special attention for their health while the bus is in motion. Drivers should not be required to concentrate on severe student needs while driving the bus. Drivers may also need help while loading and unloading students in mobility devices. This assistance is critical given the possible need to rapidly evacuate the bus in an emergency. There are currently no standards for the requirement of an assistant or monitor on a school bus transporting students with special needs.

SPI should establish criteria which will determine when a monitor is required on a school bus transporting students with special needs. Transportation program or special education funding will be required to specifically cover the cost of these monitors.

Action Required:

SPI must develop standards to determine when monitors shall be used on a special transportation bus. The legislature must provide appropriate funding to cover the cost of the mandated monitors.

Recommendation #7

Providing Drivers Student Management Resources

Summary of Recommendation:

Conduct a pilot project to provide school bus drivers with school buses equipped with a video monitoring system so that drivers will be somewhat relieved of the task of identifying disruptive students while safely operating the vehicle in traffic.

The objective is to provide resources to assist drivers with student management. The anticipated cost of conducting this pilot project is $55,000.

Background:

Special Report 222, **Improving School Bus Safety,** by The National Academy of Sciences, 1989, considered the benefits of monitors on school buses. They considered the cost effectiveness of monitors for reducing the number of student injuries and fatalities both inside and outside the bus. Monitors could ensure that students remain in their seats with head and arms inside the bus and they could reduce driver distractions through better control of the students. Monitors could also be used as crossing guards to accompany children (particularly younger children) across streets when they board or leave school buses.

Even though it was generally agreed that the use of school bus monitors could enhance school bus safety, the cost effectiveness of such a program placed this consideration at the bottom of the list of options to consider for improving school bus safety. If we were to provide a monitor for each school bus in daily operation in Washington state, the additional annual cost is estimated to be $31,000,000.

Current rules allow school districts to use volunteers as monitors on school buses. Such a program properly initiated would require screening and training of the monitors. In addition, the role of the monitor should be clearly established with the driver having ultimate authority. It is only logical that any person allowed to perform a function for the school district would establish the same liability for the district as a paid employee. The students and parents deserve that protection. Districts need to commit a substantial investment in preparing volunteers for this task; there is some concern about the ability to count the regular participation of an unpaid person.

Video monitors have been developed to aid the bus driver with student management. Identifying which student is responsible for disrupting behavior while safely operating the bus is a problem for the bus driver. Better administrative support for student discipline may be available to the driver with better documentation of the student behavior problems. This approach has the potential to provide the driver most of what would be the benefits of another person on the bus without the extraordinary cost implications.

Action Required:

SPI needs a special appropriation to conduct a demonstration project to evaluate the effectiveness of using video recording devices to improve student management on school buses. This project must be evaluated for consideration of statewide application.

Recommendation #8

Equip School Buses with Crossing Arms

Summary of Recommendation:

Install crossing arms on the front bumper of all school buses. This mandatory retrofit program could be accomplished in one year through a state coordinated effort. Student loading and unloading safety would be improved by installing these crossing arms on school buses.

The cost to implement this recommendation is estimated to be $500,000.

Background:

National statistics indicate two-thirds of all children killed in school bus and pedestrian accidents are struck by school buses. Of those killed, two-thirds are struck by the front of the bus and one-third by the rear of the bus, usually the rear wheels (Special Report 222, "Improving School Bus Safety", The National Academy of Sciences, 1989, p. 125). Washington had a student pedestrian school bus fatality during the 1989-90 school year. This pedestrian was struck by the front of the bus. Crossing control arms are designed to force students to cross a minimum distance in front of the bus. This device reinforces the instructions provided to students for safe loading and unloading procedures which attempt to keep the crossing children within the bus driver's view. North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia now have mandatory crossing arm requirements. Two states, which have mandated crossing control arms for eleven and seven years respectively (North Carolina and Georgia), have demonstrated impressive improvements in their school bus student pedestrian accident experience. Georgia has mandated the crossing control arms since 1983, and has not experienced a front-end fatality after that date. In 1978, one year prior to the adoption of the mandatory crossing arm law, there were nine fatalities involving North Carolina school children in the loading and unloading zones. Less than nine have been killed in North Carolina in the 11 years since the crossing control arms became a requirement. Virginia has just completed a statewide mandatory retrofit of crossing control arms on 8,000 school buses. They were able to accomplish this for $500,000 because it was a state-organized and coordinated program.

Action Required:

A specific legislative appropriation must be made for this purpose. If it is to be a state coordinated effort to achieve Virginia's economy, SPI needs special authorization and it should be so noted in the appropriation.

Recommendation #9

Mandate "To and From School Safety" Education Program for All Elementary Students and Adult Drivers

Summary of Recommendation:

This recommendation will require that students are provided a "To and From School Safety" education program at least twice each year within two weeks of the beginning of each school term. This program must cover both walking safety between home and school and home and the bus stop, as well as bus ridership safety from the bus stop to school and return again.

In addition, public service announcements aimed at the adult driver will be prepared annually for radio and television audiences. The theme "When kids are walking to school, they come first", has been proposed for the walking safety program.

The cost is estimated to be $250,000 annually for the ongoing needs to support the statewide mandated program in the public schools and an additional $600,000 annually to fund twelve more Safety Education Officers (SEO) in order for the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to meet the current and anticipated future needs for supporting student safety programs related to traveling to and from school. In addition, annual expenditures for the preparation and distribution of public service announcements are anticipated to be $125,000.

Background:

Special Report 222, "Improving School Bus Safety," The National Academy of Sciences, 1989, concluded that pupil education programs could be the most effective activity in reducing student deaths and injuries for students traveling to and from school. Washington has no such mandatory program. Many school districts have some programs which promote student safety. However, these programs seldom reach all students in the district who could benefit. The WSP has a SEO program with a portion of their curriculum designed to assist school districts, upon request, in "To and From School Safety Education" and school bus driver

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training. However, the WSP SEO program does not have enough staff to handle all current requests.

Rules requiring such a program will provide better quality and uniformity regarding student safety while traveling to and from school. There will be improved student performance while riding on buses. There will be a more coordinated effort on student management and discipline. More students will be presented an educational program which will promote safer student pedestrian behaviors.

Adult drivers need to be reminded of their responsibility for the safety of students travelling to and from school. Public service announcements at the beginning of the school year reminding these drivers about responsible driving behavior around children and schools will deliver an important safety message which should improve driver behavior.

Action Required:

Appropriations need to be made by the legislature prior to the enactment of law or administrative codes requiring such a program.

Recommendation #10

Provide Hazardous Walking Condition Funding for Social Problems Within One-mile of Schools

Summary of Recommendation:

Funding will be available for the transportation of students who would otherwise have to walk through areas where unacceptable social conditions exist. Statewide standards will be established for use by law enforcement agencies and school districts.

The cost of this recommendation cannot be estimated because of the lack of appropriate data. The cost will be approximately $170,000 for each 1,000 students transported under this provision.

Background:

Currently, the state only funds the transportation of children to school if the child lives further than a one mile radius of the school. The only exception is if it has been determined that walking to school would be hazardous. The determination of "hazardous walking conditions" is based only on roadway and traffic conditions. Considering recent interest in student safety for students walking to and from school and the changing social conditions in the communities of Washington State, it is recommended to recognize unacceptable social conditions as an independent criteria for qualifying students for transportation funding. This would allow transportation funding for all eligible students who would otherwise have to walk past problem areas created by unacceptable social conditions documented by an official in charge of a law enforcement agency governing that area. The following conditions would be included: narcotics, sex offenders, prostitution, "street violence", dangerous animals, and environmentally dangerous conditions (toxic chemical dumps, etc.). This documentation will need to be updated annually. Distance (length of the walkway in association with the hazard) will not be a factor in this qualification process and it will be independent of any other qualification process for transportation funding within a one-mile radius of school.

Action Required:

SPI must revise the regulations to allow funding for Hazardous Walking Conditions recognizing social factors. Standards will need to be developed to limit the scope of this recommendation.

Recommendation #11

School Bus Replacement

Summary of Recommendation:

Student safety while riding school buses is being compromised because of the excessive number of pre-77 buses in daily operation. Policies and procedures must be changed for funding school bus purchases to retire obsolete school buses.

The cost of this systematic retirement of obsolete buses requires replacement of 470 buses every year. Estimated annual cost is $24.2 million. State front-funding will require an increase in appropriations of $15.2 million per year. Over time, this investment will reduce repair, operating and interest costs by like amount.

Background:

The statewide school bus fleet includes over 5,600 district-owned buses. More than 2,100 of these buses do not meet Federal safety standards in effect since April 1, 1977. These buses expose children to avoidable risk of injuries. In addition, 1,500 other buses are beyond normal life expectancy, resulting in annual costs of $10 million for extraordinary avoidable repairs.

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School districts have been expected to front-fund purchase of school buses with local special levies and school districts have not met this requirement. In nine years' time, 75 percent of the school districts have never attempted to pass a Transportation Vehicle Fund levy to purchase buses; less than 10 percent of the school districts have attempted more than one bus purchase levy. Special levies for school bus purchases compete with levies for educational programs and bond proposals for school construction. These circumstances have severely limited local revenues for bus purchases. This has limited bus purchases and yielded an aging school bus fleet. State front-funding is necessary to ensure continuous scheduled retirement of obsolete and aging school buses. This will also remove the current cash-flow penalty that results from the current school bus replacement process.

Safety of students will be greatly enhanced. Modern school buses provide much greater passenger protection from high padded seats and seat backs, protection from fuel spillage and fire, rollover protection, crush resistance, and other major safety improvements in design and construction of school buses.

Efficiency and cost effectiveness of pupil transportation will be improved. Continued operation of worn out buses is wasteful, requiring frequent and expensive overhauls and rebuilding, causing repeated disruptions due to diminished reliability, and generate excessive amounts of air pollutants.

Action Required:

RCW 28A.160.200 (former RCW 28A.41.540) must be amended by the legislature. The legislature must appropriate an additional $15 million each year to fund the change. SPI will need to rewrite the regulations authorized by the new law.